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This is not to say that our pages nowadays are entirely devoid of serious thought about what it means to be a Benedictine. Since 1995 we have become an exclusively monastic journal, and while that does not mean that everything we print deals with the theoretical underpinnings of monastic life, most of our articles have some bearing on this question. Still, it would be good to have some out-and-out monastic philosophy in our pages once again. Isn't it time we review the basic issues once again? Every generation has to rethink its basic principles, and ours is no exception.

The third and final lacuna that meets the eye in our pages, or rather does not meet the eye, is American Benedictine history. Here again, it has not always been that way. There was a time, in the earlier years of the history of ABR, when people were researching the archives of our monasteries and sharing their results with the rest of us. The reason why that happened was that many communities experienced their centenaries around 1960-80. Many monasteries try to produce a history at that time. Right now, though, there are not many anniversaries and there is a corresponding dearth of local monastic history being written in this country.

Fortunately, this third hole is not black, only grey. Certainly James Flint's account of the Lay Brothers of St. Procopius Abbey that appeared here last year was precisely what the doctor ordered in this regard. That was a good example of "thick" history writing, and many people have expressed appreciation for it. The good news is that we have two long articles in the same vein coming up in the next year or two. Stay tuned!

Well, you might say, if you need articles on Late Medieval History or Modern Monastic Monastic Theory why not go out and commission them? Would that we could do so! But that's not the way the world of scholarship and writing works. True, it is sometimes possible to convince someone who has given a good talk to put it into writing for our pages. But by and large our pages will simply reflect what people are interested in studying and writing. It has to come from inside the authors, not from the editor. So we sit here and wait for other people to get to work, but we won't hold our breath.

## FIGURES IN THE CARPET: MACARIUS THE GREAT, ISALAH OF SCETIS, DANIEL OF SCETIS, AND MONASTIC SPIRITUALITY IN THE WADI AL-NATRUN (SCETIS) FROM THE FOURTH TO THE SIXTH CENTURY

Tim Vivian

Monks have been in the Wadi al-Natron (ancient Scetis) in Egypt for almost 1700 years.<sup>1</sup> Most studies of early monasticism focus on its history,<sup>2</sup> but here I wish to examine its spirituality by looking in particular at the spirituality of early monasticism in the Wadi al-Natron.<sup>3</sup> Such an effort will, I hope, offer a history of a different sort, a history of the heart, mind, and spirit in one place at one particular time.<sup>4</sup> Such a history, I firmly believe, has

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I wish to thank Augustine Casiday and William Harmless, S.J. for their comments. This article was originally presented in shorter form as a paper at the Wadi al-Natron Symposium, January 31-February 5, 2002, St. Pshoi Monastery, Egypt, and was reprinted in *Coptica*.

<sup>2</sup>The magisterial achievement of Hugh G. Evelyn White, *The Monasteries of the Wādi 'N Natrūn*, three vols. (rpt., New York: Arno 1973) is still unmatched. See also Derwas J. Chitty, *The Desert a City* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, n.d.); and James E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity 1999).

<sup>3</sup>As Mark Sheridan has commented in "The Spiritual and Intellectual World of Early Egyptian Monasticism," *Coptica* 1 (2002) 1-51, "the cultivation of the interior life was effectively at the heart of" early Egyptian monasticism. His essay surveys in particular Antony, Paul of Tamma, and Pachomius.

<sup>4</sup>By "spirituality" I will follow Kenneth J. Collins and adopt first a broad definition, "the importance of surpassing oneself into a wider circle of meaning with its resultant enlightenment or greater knowledge of God," then add with him the specifically Christian "revelation of God manifested in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit." See Collins, ed., *Exploring Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2000) 13 and 14. On p.14, Collins notes that spirituality transcends "egocentric

relevance for all places and time.<sup>5</sup>

The monks of late antiquity may be compared to a beautiful handwoven carpet of burnished reds and oranges, made in Egypt. Such a carpet has many smaller figures in it, united around a large central figure; all the figures work together to make a coherent and cohesive pattern. That carpet represents the mothers and fathers of early Egyptian monasticism gathered around their Lord and Savior, listening attentively to the Word in the desert. From those ammas and abbas I will focus here on three representatives of early desert monasticism in Scetis from the fourth through the sixth century, one from each century: Macarius the Great (4th cen.), Isaiah of Scetis (5th cen.), and Daniel of Scetis (6th cen.). My hope is that by the end of the paper these three figures will have given us a clearer picture of the intricate and beautiful carpet of early monasticism and will help us better understand why the early monks were in the desert and what they were hoping to accomplish there.

Macarius, Isaiah, and Daniel lived during the first golden era of Egyptian monasticism (the twentieth century, amazingly enough, appears to be the second).<sup>6</sup> Although two hundred years commitments" and leads to "sociocentric ones as well," that is, to community, which is vital to early Christian monasticism.

<sup>5</sup>I acknowledge the "gap of incomprehension" that Columba Stewart and others have emphasized between the early monastics and ourselves. Stewart, who once desired to close that gap, now says that he needs "to step back and keep the gap open." See Columba Stewart, "'We?' Reflections on Affinity and Dissonance in Reading Early Monastic Literature," *Spiritus* 1.1 (Spring 2001) 93-102. By contrast, Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (Oxford: Clarendon 1993) 186, with whom I concur, acknowledges that "there is much which is alien in their teaching," but goes on to confirm that "the Desert Fathers have proved their capacity to speak clearly even sixteen centuries after the hey-day of their communities." Alan Jones has commented that Dante's *Divine Comedy* is both accessible and inaccessible; so too are the Desert Fathers and Mothers.

<sup>6</sup>The literature on twentieth-century Egyptian monasticism is growing steadily; see Otto Meinardus, *Monks and Monasteries of the Egyptian Deserts* (Cairo: American U in Cairo 1961) and the rev. ed. (Cairo: American U in Cairo 1989); Mark Gruber, O.S.B., *Journey Back to Eden: My Life and Times among the Desert Fathers* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 2002); Gawdat Gabra, *The Monasteries of Egypt* (Cairo: American U in Cairo 2002); and Tim Vivian, "The Monasteries of the Wadi Natrun, Egypt: A Personal and Monastic Journey," *ABR* 49:1 (March 1998) 3-32, and "A Journey to the Interior: The Monastery of Saint Antony by the Red Sea," *ABR* 50.3 (September 1999) 277-310, rpt. in Vivian, *Words to Live By: Journeys in Ancient and Modern Monasticism* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian 2005).

encompass their lifetimes and the ancient literature by and about them varies, the three together nevertheless offer a fairly comprehensive overview of early monastic spirituality and a catalogue of its attributes. The literature about Macarius, both hagiographical and apophthegmatical, stresses the importance of community and the centrality of the abba-disciple relationship. The abba as holy man and teacher inculcates in the disciple and the community monastic—and Christian—virtues: single-mindedness, a life of prayer, renunciation, humility, *hesychia* (contemplative quiet), compassion, and a refusal to judge others.

Through sayings, instructions, and homilies, Isaiah transmitted in the fifth century the monastic traditions of an earlier generation, although he did so with his own unique emphases. Much of Isaiah's focus is on the passions, those devices and desires of the heart that draw us away from God. Unlike earlier monastic literature (with Evagrius as the clear exception), Isaiah develops the underlying theological principles for his ascetic beliefs and practices. He clearly formulates a theology of nature and the passions and his soteriology emphasizes the cross more than fourth-century monastic thought. Isaiah uses the cross to explicate the different levels of the spiritual life.

Unlike Isaiah, and even Macarius, Daniel left no writings or sayings; the literature about him consists of hagiographical reports about the holy man's activities in the sixth century. These stories emphasize holiness. They both expand the early monastic definition of holiness and contract it: they expand it by lauding non-monastics and strange monastics and contract it by focusing not on the typical signs and wonders wrought by the holy man but rather on other, quotidian virtues. Daniel is holy, in fact, because he has the humility and discernment to see holiness in others. The Daniel dossier presents different types of holiness as evinced by different kinds of holy characters: the holy fool, the ex-patriate, and the transvestite (female ascetics clothed as men).

These three figures, then, show that monasticism in late antiquity Scetis was variegated both in pattern and color. No overarching theme connects Macarius, Isaiah, and Daniel except their love of God and their desire to live a godly life. The former is assumed, while the latter develops differently in each saint's writings. The longer one looks at the carpet of early monastic literature, the more one sees its multitudinous patterns and plentiful and intricate colors. Each of the figures is distinct, yet each con-

tributes to the whole, like each monk within a monastic community. By looking at each of these saints individually, we can better see how their monastic community (and communities) prospered. By doing this, we will then be in a better position to understand and incorporate the spiritual treasure they have bequeathed to us.

# I. SAINT MACARIUS THE GREAT (300-90)<sup>7</sup>

*Feast Day: 27 Barmahat (April 5)*

Macarius the Great, also called Macarius of Egypt to distinguish him from Macarius of Alexandria, came to Scetis (the Wadi al-Natron) about 330 AD, settling first, perhaps, near the present-day monastery of Deir al-Baramus, and later moving near the site of the present-day monastery that bears his name: Deir Anba Maqar, the Monastery of Saint Macarius.<sup>8</sup> Before he came to Scetis, Macarius, like Antony the Great, was probably an *apotaktikos* or village ascetic.<sup>9</sup> Then, also like Antony, he withdrew (*anachôrein*) to the desert and thus became an anchorite (*anachôrîtês*). Soon, however, Macarius, like Antony, and like Amoun in Nitria at the same time, began to attract disciples who formed a community around him. Such a community was semi-anchoritic; that is, unlike the cenobitic monks in Pachomius' *koinonia* in Upper Egypt, the monks of Scetis, Nitria, and Kellia lived alone during the week or in small groups where an abba or spiritual father directed one or more younger monks.<sup>10</sup> On Satur-

<sup>7</sup>On the ancient works by and about Macarius discussed below (the Coptic *Sayings*, the *Virtues of Saint Macarius*, and the *Life of Macarius of Scetis*) with introductions and translations, see Tim Vivian, *Saint Macarius the Spiritbearer: Coptic Texts Relating to Saint Macarius the Great* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary 2004).

<sup>8</sup>White, Vol. 2, 98-103; *The Life of Macarius of Scetis* 21. For a general presentation, still see Derwas Chitty.

<sup>9</sup>For the *apotaktikoi*, see Goehring, 20-25, 53-72; *Life of Macarius of Scetis* 13, in Vivian, *Saint Macarius* (n. 7 above).

<sup>10</sup>For a good general overview of anchoritic and semi-anchoritic monasticism, see Lucien Regnault, *La vie quotidienne des pères du désert en Egypte au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Hachette 1990) trans. Étienne Poirier, Jr., *The Day-to-Day Life of the Desert Fathers in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications 1999).

days and Sundays all the monks would come together for worship (*synaxis*), the Eucharist, and a common meal (*agapê*).<sup>11</sup>

The early monastic endeavor, then, was both individual and communal; in the felicitous phrasing that French allows, the Desert Fathers and Mothers practiced "la vie solitaire et la vie solidaire" (solitary and communal life).<sup>12</sup> Central to their spirituality is this symbiosis and this tension. Historians have suggested a number of reasons for the sudden rise of monasticism in Egypt, among them withdrawal (*anachôrêsis*) from oppressive taxation and disaffection from an increasingly worldly Church. But historians rarely talk about the desire to live a holy life (*eusebeia*); holiness, unlike high taxes and grasping prelates, cannot be readily quantified.<sup>13</sup> The *Life of Macarius of Scetis*, by contrast, written sometime before the tenth century, saw Macarius as following in the "godly footsteps" of the apostles as he "looked forward to the imperishable hope that the Savior taught us through his holy teachings in the Gospels."<sup>14</sup> In allegiance to the Gospel visitations to Zechariah (Lk 1:8-20) and Mary (Lk 1:26-55), the author of the *Life of Macarius* has "Abraham, the father of Isaac who begot Jacob," declare to Macarius' father:

Leave this land, for God has so decided it. . . . "I will not forsake you," says the Lord, "but I will bless you," he said (Dt 31:6, Josh 1:5; Gen 17:16, 20), for I too left my country of Haran and I dwelt in the land of Canaan, as the Lord told me: "And I will give you a son," said the Lord, "from this wife whom you now have, and his name will endure for generations with the children that he will beget spiritually to serve me in the place that I will show him" (Gen 17:15-19, 18:9-15).

According to the *Life of Macarius of Scetis*, Macarius, like Abraham, will beget a new people. Abraham begot according to

<sup>11</sup>On the weekend *synaxis* and agape, see Regnault, *La vie quotidienne*, 177-88, and Cecil Donahue, "The AGAPH of the Hermits of Scetis," *Studia Monastica* 1 (1959) 97-114. On instruction, see the Coptic "Life of Evagrius" 17 in Vivian, *Saint Macarius the Spiritbearer*. For the tension between solitude and community, see Gould 142-50.

<sup>12</sup>Antoine Guillaumont, "Histoire des moines aux Kellia," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 8 (1977) 187-203, at 194.

<sup>13</sup>Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford U 1993) as the subtitle of his book suggests, has understood the importance of holiness in early monasticism.

<sup>14</sup>*Life of Macarius of Scetis* 1 (Proemium).

the flesh; Macarius, however, will beget spiritually.<sup>15</sup> Others, both ancient and modern, have expressed in other ways what the author of the *Life* saw biblically and typologically. In the *Life of Antony*, Athanasius enthuses that Antony and his followers were making the desert a city and a modern scholar has similarly observed that the early monks "were intent upon creating a new society."<sup>16</sup> As Stelios Ramfos has observed,

The anchorite is not offended primarily by the world; he is offended by futility. He needs to be part of a society which is more sensitive and more real and lives by unadulterated truths different from those of the market-place, so that instead of persisting in what is transient he decides to seek the *eschaton*, the ultimately real.<sup>17</sup>

The writer of the *Life of Macarius of Scetis*, whatever his merits or demerits as an historian, long ago understood the spirituality of Macarius' desert endeavor and particularly emphasizes the creation and sustenance of community. Any treatment of early monasticism should begin with a discussion of this early monastic spirituality of community.<sup>18</sup>

If community is central to monastic spirituality, then the abba, a holy person like Macarius, Antony, Amoun, and many others, is the still point of that center, the anchor, the nexus, the begetter of spiritual children.<sup>19</sup> The abba, of course, is inspired and guided by God. Although the *Apophthegmata*, or *Sayings* of the Desert Fa-

<sup>15</sup>In the *Life of Macarius of Scetis* 8, an angel declares to Macarius: "Thus says God: 'This land I will give to you. You shall dwell in it and blossom and your fruits shall increase and your seed shall multiply [Gen 12:7] and you shall bear multitudes of spiritual children and rulers who will suckle at your breasts.'"

<sup>16</sup>*Life of Antony* 14.7; Philip Rousseau, "The Desert Fathers, Antony and Pachomius," in Cheslyn Jones, et al., eds., *The Study of Spirituality* (London: SPCK 1992) 119-30, at 120.

<sup>17</sup>Stelios Ramfos, *Like a Pelican in the Wilderness: Reflections on the Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. and abridged by Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox 2000) 11. As Ramfos adds, p. 21, "The morality of the Desert Fathers is nourished not by a set of rules about relationships with material things, but by a radical demand for inward change and purification concerning relationships with person."

<sup>18</sup>Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, has understood this particularly well.

<sup>19</sup>On spiritual fatherhood, see especially Gabriel Bunge, *Geistliche Vaterschaft: Christliche Gnosis bei Evagrius Pontikos* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet 1988).

thers and Mothers, does not emphasize this, it is a given of its spirituality,<sup>20</sup> the *Life of Macarius of Scetis* represents and personifies God's guidance with a cherub that directs Macarius and keeps him focused.<sup>21</sup> The story of Maximus and Domitius, though much of it is legendary,<sup>22</sup> accurately illustrates both how a community could grow around a holy person and shows the relationship that developed between abba and disciple. As Macarius explains,

When I was sitting in my dwelling in Scetis, two young men, foreigners and strangers, came to see me . . . and said, "Where is Abba Macarius' cell?" I said to them, "What do you want with him?" They said to me, "When we heard about his works and about Scetis, we came to see him." I said to them, "I am he." They begged my pardon and said, "We want to live here."<sup>23</sup>

Macarius thinks the two are too soft to last in the desert so he orders them to hew a cell for themselves from the rock of an abandoned quarry. This they willingly do, illustrating Macarius' authority and their humility and obedience, all important components of monastic spirituality. The two "patiently did everything" Macarius had ordered, but when they did not come to see the old man for three years he mused to himself, "What is their way of life? They haven't come to see me about their thoughts. Those who live far away come to see me but these two do not come, nor have they gone to anyone else, only to church, and only to receive the Eucharist, keeping silent all the while." The sharing of thoughts, *logismoi*, with an elder and his giving of spiritual counsel was extremely important in early monasticism and was a vital part of monastic formation and discernment.<sup>24</sup> So Macarius goes

<sup>20</sup>See Gould 38-41. Gould points out, p.11, how apposite the *Apophthegmata* are for the study of the history and spirituality of Scetis. See Burton-Christie.

<sup>21</sup>*Life of Macarius of Scetis* 15, 27.

<sup>22</sup>For a discussion, see Evelyn White 98-104; for the text, see the *Coptic Life of Maximus and Domitius*, ed. Emile Amélineau, *Histoire des moines de la Basse-Egypte*. Annales de Musée Guimet 25 (Paris, 1894) 262-315.

<sup>23</sup>The Coptic *Sayings of Saint Macarius of Egypt* 8 (= Greek *Alphabetical Apophthegmata* 33), trans. Tim Vivian, "The Coptic Sayings of Saint Macarius of Egypt," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 35.4 (2000) 499-523, at 507-09. Reprinted in Vivian, *Saint Macarius the Spiritbearer*.

<sup>24</sup>In the *Apophthegmata*, Abba Paphnutius reports that he went to see elders twice a month, walking some 12 miles (*Alphabetical Apophthegmata*

to see the two young monks, learns of their holy way of life, and thus the elder is himself edified (a common theme in early monastic texts).

As the story of Maximus and Domitius shows, one of the chief characteristics of early monastic literature is "a far-reaching interest in the pattern of personal relationships within the monastic community."<sup>25</sup> Although the Greek and Coptic *Apophthegmata* concerning Macarius have only five or six abba-disciple sayings (out of 41 and 34 sayings respectively), where a monk explicitly asks Macarius for counsel, the *Virtues of Saint Macarius*, probably a fifth- to eighth-century compilation, has many more.<sup>26</sup> Both the *Apophthegmata* and the *Virtues*, however, have many more sayings—the majority in fact—where Macarius is teaching or giving advice. These presuppose monks or disciples who are listening and who must have often asked a question. It is clear from these three sources that Macarius' chief role was that of spiritual counselor. If we utilize the epithet that the *Virtues* gives to Macarius, "Spiritbearer," then Macarius bore and passed on the Holy Spirit when he taught his charges about the spiritual life.<sup>27</sup>

As Graham Gould has wisely observed, the abba-disciple relationship was "not a matter of practical convenience but a divinely guaranteed means by which a monk grows, by obedience and trust in what his abba tells him to do, in his acceptability to

Paphnutius 3; PG 65.380), and Abba John the Little used to sit in front of the church on weekends so that monks might approach him about their thoughts (*Alphabetical Apophthegmata* John Kolobos 8; PG 65.205). See also Tim Vivian, "Words to Live By: A Conversation that the Elders Had with One Another Concerning Thoughts (ΠΕΡΙ ΛΟΓΙΣΜΩΝ)," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 39:2 (1995) rpt. in Vivian, *Words to Live By: Journeys in Ancient and Modern Monasticism* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 2005); and Columba Stewart, "Radical Honesty about the Self: the Practice of the Desert Fathers," *Sobornost* 12 (1990) 25-39. Failure to seek counsel could lead to presumptuous self-importance and ruin; see *Lausiac History* 27.2.

<sup>25</sup>Gould, p.17, who is speaking of the *Apophthegmata*.

<sup>26</sup>On the dating of the *Virtues*, see Vivian, *Saint Macarius the Spirit-bearer*, Introduction. About 32 out of 83 sayings in the *Virtues* involve a disciple asking Macarius for counsel.

<sup>27</sup>"Spiritbearer" was also applied to Saints Antony and Pachomius; see *Alphabetical Apophthegmata* Antony 30 and François Halkin, ed., *Sancti Pachomii vitae graecae, Subsidia Hagiographica* 19 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes 1932) 153.19.

God."<sup>28</sup> The first requirement (virtue) asked of the disciple was renunciation of one's own will and obedience to an abba, who represents God.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps the most striking example in the Macarian corpus occurs when Macarius tells a young monk to go to the cemetery and abuse, then praise, the dead, who of course care nothing about either praise or abuse. When the disciple returns the second time, Macarius teaches him:

You saw how you abused them and they did not say anything to you and how you praised them and they said nothing in reply; it's the same with you: if you wish to be saved, go, be dead, take no account of people's scorn or their compliments, like the dead themselves, and you can be saved.<sup>30</sup>

As Macarius' final words suggest, the young monk's question/petition to the old man was "My father, tell me a word how I may be saved." Macarius' answer—and the expected change in outlook or behavior that that answer expects—shows that the abba-disciple relationship was not only formational and transformational, it was also systolically and diastolically soteriological. Just as the young man in the Gospels asks Jesus what he must do to have eternal life (Mt 19:16), over and over in the *Apophthegmata* disciples sincerely ask their spiritual fathers how they can be saved.<sup>31</sup> As a letter writer in Late Antique Egypt famously wrote to the holy man Paphnutius who was counselling him, "After God you are my salvation." What Philip Rousseau calls a "hand-to-mouth spirituality" must also be recognized as mouth-to-mouth spirituality; that is, the passing on of the Spirit, in emulation of Christ (Jn 20:22).<sup>32</sup> An image of spiritual CPR (Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation) is not out of place here: we are all dy-

<sup>28</sup>Gould 27-28. On the subject of master and disciple in early monasticism, see the excellent article by Jean-Claude Guy, "Educational Innovation in the Desert Fathers," *Eastern Churches Review* 6 (1974) 44-51.

<sup>29</sup>On renunciation, see Burton-Christie 214-22.

<sup>30</sup>Coptic Sayings 11 (= Greek *Alphabetical Apophthegmata* 23). For other striking examples of obedience, see *Alphabetical Apophthegmata* Antony 20 and John Kolobos 1 and the tales about Abba John of Lycopolis, related by Cassian, *Institutes* 4.23-26.

<sup>31</sup>Jesus' final answer to the young man to give up everything and follow him (Mt 19:21) became the *locus classicus* for the understanding of the monastic calling.

<sup>32</sup>See Rousseau 121.

ing, the monastic texts suggest, and desperately require resuscitation in the Spirit. In the desert, those who ask receive.

What virtues (practices, habits) were abbas like Macarius trying to inculcate in their disciples in order to bring about a saving way of life (*politeia*)? The list is long, and I can focus here only on a few that are central. Perhaps the most important requirement of the ancient monastic life was single-mindedness. Life in Christ is not easy. With a wonderful metaphor, the Macarius of the *Virtues* teaches about single-mindedness and its difficulties:

If you pursue prayer, pay careful attention to yourself lest you place your pots in the hands of your enemies, for they desire to steal your pots, which are the thoughts of your soul. These are the precious pots with which you will serve God, for God does not look for you to glorify him only with your lips, while your thoughts wander to and fro and are scattered throughout the world, but requires that your soul and all its thoughts wait upon the sight of the Lord without distraction, for he is the great physician, the healer of souls and bodies, our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>33</sup>

Waiting "upon the sight of the Lord without distraction" makes one like the angels. In ancient sources the monastic life is often called "the angelic life," but to truly appreciate what that means we need to pry our minds free from cute and saccharine modern images of angels and give ear to what Macarius is really saying: "The rank of monk is like that of the angels. Just as the angels stand in the Lord's presence at all times and no earthly thing hinders them from standing in his presence, so too it is with the monk: it is fitting that he should be like the angels his whole life."<sup>34</sup> The monk should always stand before God and be in God's presence.

In early monasticism such an understanding lives (or fights) side by side with Saint Paul's injunction to pray without ceasing (1 Thes 5:17), one of the main goals, and fruits, of the monastic life. But Macarius then jarringly adds that by living like the angels the monk "will fulfill the word of our Savior who commands

<sup>33</sup>*Virtues* 67. For the consequences of the theft of some non-metaphorical pots, see *Virtues* 46.

<sup>34</sup>*Virtues* 55. See Karl Suso Frank, *Angelikos bios: begriffsanalytische und begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum "engelgleichen Leben" im frühen Mönchtum*, Beiträge zur Geschichte des alten Mönchtums und des Benediktinerordens 26 (Münster, Westfalen: Aschendorff 1964) and Agnes Lamy, "Monks and the Angelic Life," *Monastic Studies* 1 (1963) 39-57.

each of us to deny himself and take up his cross and follow him" (Mt 10:38/Lk 14:27). One does not normally associate angels with the cross (unlike with the Annunciation, Nativity, and Resurrection of Christ, there are no angels at the Crucifixion), but Macarius does. By doing this he forcefully steers us away from our besetting sin (self-absorption, self-indulgence, narcissism, hyper-individualism, call it what we will) and returns our gaze, like the angels, to God.<sup>35</sup> Angels gaze but we human beings work with our backs, and our backs must bear the cross of Christ. In either case, gazing or groaning, we are worshipping God by working for Christ as he works his way to Calvary for us.

It should be no surprise, then, that the monastic life requires renunciation; in this it is only, and entirely, following the Gospel (Mt 4:20, 19:21, 19:27; Acts 4:34-35). Macarius knew that Gospel, and himself, well enough to know that even after years in the desert he could say, "I have not yet become a monk, but I have seen monks." This seemingly astounding statement is in fact a common motif in early monastic literature. Macarius could say this because he had travelled from the relatively suburban security and comforts of Scetis out into the *real* desert. There he encountered two monks living naked on an island in a marshy lake where the wild animals came to drink.<sup>36</sup> When Macarius asks them how he can become a monk, they say to him, "If one does not renounce all worldly things, he can not become a monk." Macarius then laments, "I am weak; I can not be like you," to which they tersely reply, "If you can not be like us, sit in your cell and weep for your sins."<sup>37</sup> Perhaps Macarius was able later to "renounce all worldly things." In two sayings, when thieves are plundering his goods, Macarius in fact helps them.<sup>38</sup>

Renunciation is not an end but rather the means, the path, to *hesychia* (silence, solitude, contemplative quiet) where the monk can give all his or her attention to God.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps the best defini-

<sup>35</sup>Abba Arsenius said (*Alphabetical Apophthegmata*, Arsenius 13), "The thousands and myriads above have only one will, but people have many wills."

<sup>36</sup>On this theme see also "The Life of Onnophrius" in Tim Vivian, *Paphnutius: Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt and the Life of Onnophrius*, rev. ed. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian 2000) 143-66.

<sup>37</sup>Coptic Sayings 21 (= Greek *Alphabetical Apophthegmata* 2).

<sup>38</sup>*Alphabetical Apophthegmata* Macarius the Great 18 and 40.

<sup>39</sup>As Gould observes, p. 172, *hesychia* "seems to imply one or both of two

tion of *hesychia* is that by a poet, T.S. Eliot: "A condition of complete simplicity/(Costing not less than everything)."<sup>40</sup> The two hermits on the island mentioned above told Macarius to sit in his cell, and that was common monastic advice.<sup>41</sup> In the *Apophthegmata*, Macarius twice tells interlocutors to sit in their cells and weep for their sins.<sup>42</sup> Sitting in one's cell is not like being in one's apartment or room with the television on.<sup>43</sup> Nor is being solitary the same as being alone or lonely; one (seeming) paradox in early monastic literature is that the more one is solitary, the more one is with God—and with one's neighbor.<sup>44</sup> Solitude in prayer helps a person to cultivate relationship with God and purify the heart; voluntary poverty focuses one's attention where it should be, on the Creator instead of on what is created. Only then can the created world become "a 'reconciled space' because of the fraternity of all things in Christ." Now "there is no room for violence, contention, or rejection of the 'other.'"<sup>45</sup>

One of the early monks' favorite adjectives for God was *philanthrōpos*. *Philanthrōpia* may be translated as "God's loving compassion for humanity," and the monks at their best did their best to emulate God's love and compassion. Macarius was known for his compassion: he helped a widow in distress, went a great distance to find a treat for a sick monk, and healed the daughter of a

things: first, solitude considered in itself, and second, an inward disposition of freedom from disturbance." For a good discussion of *hesychia*, see Kallistos Ware, "Silence in Prayer: The Meaning of Hesychia," in Basil Pennington, ed., *One Yet Two: Monastic Practices East and West* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian 1976) 22-47.

<sup>40</sup>T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," *The Four Quartets*, in T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* 1909-1950 (New York: Harcourt Brace 1952) 145.

<sup>41</sup>"Sit in your cell and your cell will teach you everything" (*Alphabetical Apophthegmata*, Moses 6). See also *Alphabetical Apophthegmata* Evagrius 1; Paul of Tamma, "On the Cell," trans. Tim Vivian and Birger A. Pearson, "Saint Paul of Tamma: On the Monastic Cell (*De Cella*)," *Hallett* 23:2 (1998) 86-107, rpt. in Vivian, *Words to Live By*; and Gould 15-57.

<sup>42</sup>*Alphabetical Apophthegmata* Macarius the Great 27 and 41.

<sup>43</sup>For an interesting contemporary treatment of the cell, see Ramfos 25-39.

<sup>44</sup>See Paul of Tamma, "On the Cell." On monastic relationships with neighbors, see Gould 88-106.

<sup>45</sup>Philip Sheldrake, "Human Identity and the Particularity of Place," *Spiritus* 1.1 (Spring 2001) 43-64, at 59.

government official.<sup>46</sup> One of the most delightful, and moving, stories about monastic compassion is that of Macarius and the healing of an antelope's young. An antelope comes to Macarius, "tearing out its fur, weeping as though it were a he-goat, its tears flowing to the ground," takes Macarius by the sleeve, and guides the old man back to where she lives. Macarius discovers that the antelope's young are deformed, with their chins on their backs. Macarius groans and petitions Christ: "You who care for all of creation, our Lord Jesus Christ, who have numerous treasures of mercy, take pity on the creature you made." He then makes the sign of the cross over the young antelopes and heals them. With joy he marvels "at the goodness of God and the love for humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ as shown by his tender mercies for me and for the other beasts that he cares about."<sup>47</sup> This is not mere sentimentalism or ecological correctness; it demonstrates, rather, the incarnating of compassion, Christ's compassion, for all of God's creation, something we should take to heart.<sup>48</sup> In teaching about Christ's compassion, Macarius likens the Savior to a potter: just as the potter "prays for the precious and decorated vessels" made for emperors and priests, "he also prays for those that are ugly and inferior," those "used as chamber pots and for birthing stools," because both types of pots "are works of his hand." So too does Christ, "who possesses the treasures of numerous mercies," rejoice over both saint and sinner.<sup>49</sup>

The soul friend of compassion is non-judgmentalism, a refusal to judge our neighbor.<sup>50</sup> Early monastic literature abounds in stories teaching us not to judge. When Paphnutius, Macarius' disciple, asks the old man for a saving word, Macarius succinctly replies, "Do not do anything evil and do not judge anyone, and

<sup>46</sup>*Alphabetical Apophthegmata*, Macarius the Great 7, 8; *Coptic Sayings* 7.

<sup>47</sup>*Virtues* 14.

<sup>48</sup>See Helen Waddell, *Beasts and Saints*, ed. Esther de Waal (London: DLT 1995). The story also shares in the monastic theme of the return to paradise; see Vivian, trans., the *Life of Onnophrius*, in *Paphnutius*, 143-66.

<sup>49</sup>*Virtues* 38.

<sup>50</sup>For a fuller discussion, see Gould 123-32. Ramfos, p.132, pointedly observes that the Desert Fathers sense in judgmentalism "a radical atheism, for when judgement and the will are made absolutes, God is no longer needed. The fathers therefore identify the censure of a person with the rejection of the judgement of God."



you will be saved."<sup>51</sup> Perhaps the most striking thing said about Macarius in the ancient sources, something that was widely repeated, was that "he became a god upon earth."<sup>52</sup> Macarius' divinization (*theosis*) occurred because "just as God protects the world, so too did Abba Macarius cover shortcomings: when he saw them it was as though he did not see them and when he heard them it was as though he did not hear them."<sup>53</sup> Non-judgmentalism, of all the virtues, makes one most divine; this was something that the flinty Macarius of Alexandria had to learn from Macarius of Egypt.<sup>54</sup> When some brothers ask Macarius one time if feelings of pity are more important than works, he says yes and by way of illustration likens Christ to a street vendor:

Look at the street vendor who sells to a customer. He says to him, "I've given you a good deal," but if he sees that the customer is unhappy, he gives him back a little of his money and the customer goes away happy. It's the same with acts also: if they stand unhappy before God, the giver of good things, the true judge, our Lord Jesus Christ, his numerous acts of compassion move him and the acts leave with joy and rejoicing and gladness.<sup>55</sup>

There is indeed judgment, Macarius teaches, but judgment belongs to God, and even in judgment Christ "is merciful and full of compassion."<sup>56</sup>

Compassion and non-judgmentalism are the sweet fruits of humility, and Macarius both lived and taught humility. Macarius had an ascetic rule not to drink water if he had just drunk wine,

<sup>51</sup>Coptic Sayings 15 (= Greek *Alphabetical Apophthegmata* 28).

<sup>52</sup>For further discussion of this remarkable phrase, see Gould 124 n. 78.

<sup>53</sup>Coptic Sayings 22 (= Greek *Alphabetical Apophthegmata* 32); see also *Virtues* 1, 32, and 74; the *Life of Macarius of Scetis* 34; and *Alphabetical Apophthegmata*, Poemen 64. Coptic *hōbs* and Gk *shepazein* mean both "cover" and "protect"; an etymological echo of this in English may be heard in "protect," which derives from Latin *tegere*, to cover. The modern Coptic Liturgy of Saint Basil considers "covering" (*shepazein*) a divine attribute: God "has covered us, helped us, guarded us, accepted us, spared us, supported us, and has brought us [safely] to this hour."

<sup>54</sup>Coptic Sayings 27 (= Greek *Alphabetical Apophthegmata* 21).

<sup>55</sup>*Virtues* 25.

<sup>56</sup>*Virtues* 9. See Burton-Christie 181-85, and Tim Vivian and Apostolos N. Athanassakis, "Spiritual Direction from the Early Monastic Mothers and Fathers on Observing a Holy Lent: Chapter Three of the Greek Syntematic *Apophthegmata*, 'On Compunction,'" *Seewanee Theological Review* 44:1 (Christmas 2000) 60-78.

but if other monks offered him wine he would humbly take it, not wishing to affront monastic hospitality. Thus he would deny himself of much-needed water in the scorching desert. Finally, Macarius' disciple, fearing for his master's health, had to rebuke the overly-generous monks: "For God's sake, do not give him any more wine. Isn't it enough that he punishes himself in his cell?"<sup>57</sup> If a monk came to Macarius "fearfully as though to a saint and great old man, he would say nothing to him. But if one of the brothers heaped scorn on him, saying, 'My father, when you were a camel-driver and stole nitre and sold it, didn't the guards beat you?,' he would joyfully speak with that person about whatever he wanted."<sup>58</sup> Perhaps the ultimate compliment paid to Macarius' humility (one that he would not have wanted) was when the Devil tried to cut the old man with a scythe but was not able to. In shock the Devil cried out:

You are powerful, Macarius! I can't do anything against you! Look—what you can do, I can do too: you fast and I don't eat anything at all; you keep vigil, and I don't sleep at all. There is only one thing at which you're better than me. When Macarius asked what that was, the Devil replied, It's your humility. On account of your humility, there is nothing I can do to you.<sup>59</sup>

The Devil can imitate exterior acts of asceticism but cannot emulate interior virtues that come from the heart.

Defeating the Devil is not a simple thing and yet in a way it is. Henry David Thoreau told his fellow citizens of Concord: "Simplify! Simplify! Let your affairs be two or three rather than numbering in the thousands!"<sup>60</sup> What Thoreau preached and lived, the Desert Fathers and Mothers lived and taught centuries before: the fewer possessions we have, whether material or psychic (that is, concerns about the past and worries about the future), the fewer tools the Devil has to slice us to shreds with. The ancient sources dare to suggest that Macarius had become so simple (*haplous*), humble (*tapeinos*), and poor (*ptōchos*) that he had stripped Satan of all his weapons; all that was left for the Adver-

<sup>57</sup>Coptic Sayings 5 (= Greek *Alphabetical Apophthegmata* 10).

<sup>58</sup>Coptic Sayings 12 (= Greek *Alphabetical Apophthegmata* 31).

<sup>59</sup>*Virtues* 2 (= Greek *Alphabetical Apophthegmata* 11). One of the most powerful stories about humility in the Macarian corpus is that of the monk falsely accused of theft; see *Virtues* 46. See also Burton-Christie 236-58.

<sup>60</sup>Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*.

sary was to helplessly evaporate: "When the saint stretched out his hands, the demon disappeared and Abba Macarius continued on his way, giving glory to God."<sup>61</sup> Simplicity, paradoxically, in the hands (and heart) of the right person, is a very great spiritual weapon. Simplicity allowed Macarius to radically simplify Christian living to a few basic precepts; they could be written on the walls of the monk's cell or inscribed on his heart. When Macarius was asked "How should one pray?" he told his questioner not to make long speeches: "It's enough to stretch out one's hands and say, 'Lord, as you will, and as you know, have mercy.' And if the conflict grows fiercer, say 'Lord, help!'"<sup>62</sup> One time when Paphnutius asked Macarius for a saving word, the old man replied, "Do no evil to anyone, and do not judge anyone. Observe this and you will be saved."<sup>63</sup> Someone like this, with such simple, yet profound, understanding and wisdom, deserved to be called "a god upon earth" and "the first shoot of this vine . . . that is Shit [Scetis]."<sup>64</sup>

## II. SAINT ISAIAH OF SCETIS (d. 491)

### *Fest Day: 11 Abib (July 18)*

Saint Macarius died some eighteen years before the first destruction of Scetis by barbarian invaders in 407-08.<sup>65</sup> At that time many monks were martyred (Moses and his companions) and many others left the desert community (John Kolobos). Scetis suffered a second devastation in 434.<sup>66</sup> About this time, perhaps because of marauders, Abba Isaiah left Scetis, becoming part of the Egyptian monastic diaspora, and journeyed to Sinai, where he took up residence near Gaza.<sup>67</sup> He died on August 11, 491, a hun-

<sup>61</sup>Virtues 2 (= Greek Alphabetical Apophthegmata 11).

<sup>62</sup>Greek Alphabetical Apophthegmata 19.

<sup>63</sup>Greek Alphabetical Apophthegmata 28.

<sup>64</sup>*Life of Maximus and Domitius*, ed. Amélineau, *Histoire des monastères de la Basse Égypte* 263.

<sup>65</sup>On this destruction, see Evelyn White 151-61. In one of the more poignant exclamations from late antique Christianity, at the first destruction of Scetis Abba Arsenius groaned, "The world has lost Rome, the monks have lost Scetis" (*Alphabetical Apophthegmata* Arsenius 21).

<sup>66</sup>See Evelyn White 162-64.

<sup>67</sup>Chitty, *The Desert a City* 73; see Chitty, "Abba Isaiah," *Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series 22:1 (April 1971) 47-72, at 66-68, for the identification of Isaiah of Scetis with Isaiah of Gaza. There are few fixed dates in

dred years after Macarius.<sup>68</sup> A miscellany of his sayings, instructions, homilies, and writings has come down to us as the *Ascetic Discourses* (AD).<sup>69</sup> As Lucien Regnault has pointed out, Isaiah "presents us with a faithful echo of the teaching of the great monks of Scetis," he transmitted "to his disciples traditions inherited from the old men of Scetis who shaped the monastic life."<sup>70</sup> Isaiah's teachings, then, like Isaiah himself, became part of the wider Egyptian diaspora and joined such eminent works as the *Life of Antony*, the *Rules* of Pachomius, and the *Conferences and Institutes* of Cassian that spread the gospel of early Egyptian monasticism to Europe, Palestine, and Asia Minor.<sup>71</sup> Although most of what Isaiah hands on belongs to the common heritage of early monastic teaching (which is as he would have wanted it), his words nevertheless evince "an original form and a personal flavor that reveal a faithful disciple who has in turn become an eminent spiritual master."<sup>72</sup>

Isaiah's generation in the fifth century gathered and edited the *Apophthegmata Patrum* and he himself faithfully handed on the desert tradition to a new generation.<sup>73</sup> Isaiah has connections with a number of prominent abbots from Scetis: Poemen, Sisoës, Arsenius, Agathon, and Or, to name just a few. Thus he represents a "bridge to an earlier generation of elders," remembering Isaiah's life: about 431 he visited Paul of Thebes; he was in Palestine by 482-53 and visited Maiouma; in the autumn of 485 he was at Beit Datha, four miles from Thavatha.

<sup>68</sup>On this date, see Lucien Regnault, "Isaie de Scété ou de Gaza," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (D.Sp) (Paris, 1933) 7.2, 2083-95, at 2084, citing P. Devos, *Analecta Bollandiana* 86 (1968) 350; and Regnault, "Isaiah of Scetis, Saint," *Coptic Encyclopedia* (CE) ed. Aziz N. Atiya (New York: Doubleday 1992) 3.1305-6.

<sup>69</sup>There is still no critical edition. For the Greek text, see Augoustinos, Τοῦ δολοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν ὁββᾶ Ἡσαίου Λόγοι ΚΘ (Jerusalem, 1911; 2nd ed., Volos: Schoinas 1962). For a French translation, see Hervé de Broc, *Abbé Isaïe, Recueil ascétique* (Begrüßungen-en-Mauge: Bellefontaine 1970). Citations below are from Abba Isaiah, *Ascetic Discourses*, trans. John Chrysavgis and Pachomios (Robert) Penkett (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian 2002). I am indebted to John Chrysavgis and to Rozanne Elder, editorial director at Cistercian Publications, for sending me a manuscript of this work before publication.

<sup>70</sup>Regnault, *DSp* 2088.

<sup>71</sup>On Isaiah's influence, see Regnault, *DSp* 2093-95.

<sup>72</sup>Regnault, *DSp* 2090; see Regnault, *CE* 1306.

<sup>73</sup>Chitty, *JTS* 74; Regnault, *CE* 1305; Chrysavgis, Introduction.

conversations "held between his own elders, or simply informants, and leading personalities from the Egyptian generation of monastics in the 430s."<sup>74</sup> Isaiah's own writings, the *Ascetic Discourses*, most likely owe their literary composition not to Isaiah but to his disciple Peter.<sup>75</sup> This discipleship, in fact, helped shape (or not shape) the *Discourses*: Peter collected and recorded "all that he could of the inherited authentic teaching of the deserts, without presuming to impose on the material his own interpretation either by extensive rewriting or even by systematic ordering of the collected works."<sup>76</sup> The result is not "the systematic exposition of the mind of a single author. It is a collection, . . . expanded later, of a variety of occasional pieces—apophthegmata, monastic rule, homiletic—to ensure the recording for future generations of the authentic teaching of the Desert Fathers."<sup>77</sup> The *Discourses*, nevertheless, do have an overarching purpose, *praktikē*, inherited from Evagrius and the abbas of the apophthegmata: *praktikē* is the spiritual method of cleansing the affective or "passionate" part of the soul,<sup>78</sup> which then allows the monk to reach concord with the nature of Jesus.<sup>79</sup>

Underlying and informing Isaiah's *praktikē* is his understanding of the passions (*ta pathē*), those devices and desires that can rule and even tyrannize our hearts and minds and alienate us both from God and from our fellow human beings. Isaiah is more "theoretical" than Macarius or most of the abbas and ammas of the *Apophthegmata* (Evagrius excluded) in that he develops and expresses underlying theological principles for his ascetic beliefs and practices. (Although Isaiah, like Macarius, has a great deal to say about practical matters and practices—on thoughts, the cell, community, prayer, Scripture—I will focus here on his over-

<sup>74</sup>Chrysavgis, Introduction; on the theme of remembering, see William Harmless, S.J., "Remembering Poemen Remembering: The Desert Fathers and the Spirituality of Memory," *Church History* 69.3 (September, 2000) 483-518. Scholars have spotted Evagrian echoes in Isaiah's writings; see Regnault, *DSP* 2092-93.

<sup>75</sup>Regnault, *CE* 1305; Regnault, *DSP* 2086.

<sup>76</sup>Chitty, *JTS* 68.

<sup>77</sup>Chitty, *JTS* 69; see also Regnault, *DSP* 2085.

<sup>78</sup>Evagrius, *Praktikos* 78. That is, the part of the soul with the passions. See below.

<sup>79</sup>*to kata physin tou Iesou*. See Chitty, *JTS* 69. The Christological emphasis seems to be Isaiah's.

arching principles rather than on the bricks in the pavement beneath the arch.) At the fall, according to Isaiah, all of Adam's "senses were twisted towards that which is contrary to nature."<sup>80</sup> Christ, however, transforms what is contrary to nature (*para physin*) into what is in accordance with nature (*kata physin*). This struggle between the old Adam and the new (Rom 5) mirrors the battle that rages within each human being. Desire, for Isaiah, is not wicked or disordered: "Desire is the natural state of the intellect because without desire for God there is no love." But the Devil has "twisted" natural desire for God into "shameful desire" (*AD* 2).

The Desert Fathers and Mothers of the fourth and fifth centuries gave a great deal of thought to the passions: if the passions are an unbroken stallion, should the monk, with patience and hard work, break the stallion and, with bridle and bit, gain control over it (*damazein* in Greek), or should he acknowledge the incorrigibility of the stallion and destroy it?<sup>81</sup> Both approaches can be found among the early ammas and abbas. Kallistos Ware has observed that New Testament and Patristic thought on the whole views the desires or passions negatively but he believes that Isaiah considered the passions (desire, envy, jealousy, hatred, pride) to be in accordance with nature and therefore "a natural part of our personhood as created by God": "The ascetic seeks to redirect rather than to destroy."<sup>82</sup> It is true that Isaiah lists the passions and says that each "is in accordance with nature." But after each passion he immediately adds that it "has been changed within us" into what is now "contrary to nature" (*AD* 2). The reason for this change is the fall: "See, all these things were created together with man. But when he ate from the tree of disobedience, they were changed within him, into these shameful passions" (*AD* 2). For Isaiah, then, the passions were originally good but are now twisted and disordered.

Isaiah clearly develops a theology of nature and of the passions.<sup>83</sup> The passions, he unequivocally maintains, estrange us

<sup>80</sup>*Ascetic Discourses* 2. Hereafter references to the *Discourses* will be given in the body of the essay with the abbreviation "AD" and the chapter number.

<sup>81</sup>See, for example, *Alphabetical Apophthegmata*, John Kolobos 13.

<sup>82</sup>Kallistos T. Ware, "The meaning of 'Pathos' in Abba Isaiaas and Theodoret of Cyrus," *Studia Patristica* 20 (1989) 315-22, at 316, 319, 320.

<sup>83</sup>See *AD* 2, 16, 18, 25.

from God (AD 8). As Stelios Ramfos sharply puts it, the passions are atheistic, because they displace God.<sup>84</sup> Like some of the Desert Fathers of the fourth century, Isaiah maintains that destroying the passions is therefore a good thing (AD 17, 19). Destruction, though, probably means rectification rather than obliteration. In Cassian and Evagrius, *apatheia*, "passionlessness," "freedom from the passions," is not a state of emotionlessness but is rather a state of well-ordered emotions, as opposed to disordered emotions: the passions. For Isaiah, Moses is the archetype of the person who is "free from all passions" (AD 22). Moses legislated the Sabbath rest and Christ himself "will celebrate the true Sabbath." Christ could do this only by "ascending the Cross on the Day of Preparation" (AD 22). Isaiah celebrates this Sabbath with Christ but at the same time cries out "what a miserable wretch I am, sinning against the holy commandments! I, who carry heavy burdens on the Sabbath!" These burdens, Isaiah explicitly states, are the passions: "greed, vanity, sensual delight, lust, passion, and a loose heart" (AD 22).

The good news is that "all these and similar burdens the Lord Jesus wiped out in the body of saints and put to death in his holy body" (AD 22). Christ "came to put to death . . . the passions at work in us" (AD 23). Although Christ defeats the passions, he cannot do it alone. "Each day," Isaiah enjoins his disciples, "ponder which passion you have conquered before you proceed to make any requests to God" (AD 15). Such self-scrutiny and discipline shows that the monk progresses through *praktikê*, ascetic practices: "ascetic discipline protects us from the Enemy" (AD 4). Derwas Chitty thus rightly saw the *Ascetic Discourses* as "a practical guide."<sup>85</sup> "Force yourself to repeat many prayers," Isaiah teaches, "for prayer is the light of your soul. Every day ponder your mistakes. And, if you pray about them, God will forgive you" (AD 4). Isaiah buttresses such practical advice as this by allegorizing Rachael and Leah (Gen 29:31-35). Leah is "a symbol of ascetic discipline" while Rachael symbolizes "genuine vision." Discernment brings ascetic discipline and humility leads one to genuine vision. Unless a person goes through the entire range of *praktikê*, he cannot acquire genuine vision (AD 4).

<sup>84</sup>Ramfos 132.

<sup>85</sup>Chitty, *JTS* 69.

Through *praktikê* and getting control of themselves, the monks can return their bodily members to a natural state (AD 2). Thus Isaiah maintains and continues the early monastic vision and hope of restoration, whether one sees this as a Platonic return, as in Antony's letters, or in the more biblical understanding of paradise regained, a common belief of the early monks.<sup>86</sup> For Isaiah the intellect (*nous*) is the soul's battleground, with the gates of paradise shimmering within hailing distance. He quotes Mt 6:24, "You cannot serve God and Mammon," to show that "it is not possible for the intellect to care for two things. . . . Mammon represents all the works of this world and unless a person renounces this, he cannot serve God. Serving God means not having anything extraneous in our intellect while praying to him" (AD 25). Here Isaiah brings together the Evagrian practice of sloughing off all images that distract us from God, and Macarius' single-mindedness, understood quite literally. Isaiah warns his disciples that "unless the intellect is restored from evil to health, a person is not able to perceive the light of the Godhead" (AD 21), but he also assures them that "if the intellect stands diligently over its senses, it acquires immortality, and immortality brings it to such glory as God reveals to it" (AD 5).

For Isaiah, light and glory come for the monk, and for all of us, only by way of Calvary. The cross does not have a central place in fourth-century monastic thought, though by no means is it absent.<sup>87</sup> In the fifth century, however, Isaiah focuses more intently on the cross, and his teaching on "the ascent of the cross" appears to be his original contribution to a theology and spirituality of the crucifixion (AD 16).<sup>88</sup> Isaiah says that the intellect cannot ascend the cross until it heals the senses of all desires and disease (AD 8). This is possible for human beings solely because of Christ: if Christ "had not first healed all the passions of humanity for

<sup>86</sup>See Vivian, *Paphnutius* 143-66.

<sup>87</sup>*Alphabetical Apophthegmata*, Poemen 144; see Harmless 490-91. Cassian reflects more on the cross and crucifixion, although it is difficult to know how much of this reflects fourth-century desert tradition. See Cassian's retelling of a discourse by Pinufius in *Institutes* 4.34-35. Cassian mentions the crucifixion several times in the *Institutes*: with reference to monastic garb (1.4, 1.8) and to the canonical hours of prayer (3.3.3, 3.9.1).

<sup>88</sup>Regnault, *DSP* 2091, says that the theme of mounting the cross belongs to the second stratum of the *Ascetic Discourses*, that is, not to Isaiah's words themselves but to what his disciple Peter or others remembered about his teaching.

which he came into the world, he would not have ascended the cross" (AD 8). Christ, therefore, is able to "resurrect" the intellect from carelessness. One may well ask Isaiah why the intellect must purge itself if Christ has already healed it. It seems that Isaiah understood Christ's healing and saving action as enabling (and ennobling) human efforts. Without Christ our efforts would be in vain and we would be standing in a wasteland without even a glimpse of the distant tree-tops of paradise.

Isaiah, like Evagrius, believes that there are different levels to the spiritual life. What is striking and original about Isaiah is that he uses the cross to explicate these different levels. Isaiah distinguishes "between bearing the cross, which signifies the preparatory stage of ascetic discipline," and mounting the cross, which represents a higher stage.<sup>89</sup> Ascending or mounting the cross requires *apatheia*, being freed from the passions that separate us from God. One "ascends the cross in stillness [*hesychia*]" only after enduring and laboring and being cleansed (AD 13). "The cross is a sign of future immortality" which one gains, Isaiah insists, only after "shutting the mouths of the Pharisees and Sadducees," which he interprets as faithlessness and hopelessness (Pharisees) and craftiness, hypocrisy, and vainglory (Sadducees) (AD 13). As Isaiah forcefully puts it, "If you wish to crucify the old person" with Christ (Eph 4:22), "you must remove those things that force you to descend from the cross" (AD 26). The version of this saying preserved in the Greek *Systematic Apophthegmata* puts it even more forcefully: "You must cut off from yourself until the day you die those who would bring you down from the cross." Isaiah then defines what being on the cross means: "And you must prepare yourself to bear humiliation, to bring peace to the hearts of those who do evil to you, to humble yourself before those who wish to rule over you, and to keep silent and not judge anyone in your heart."<sup>90</sup>

Christ bearing the cross shows the monk the necessity of ascetic toil and labor; Christ on the cross demonstrates the over-

<sup>89</sup>Chrysavgis, Introduction; AD 8.

<sup>90</sup>*Systematic Apophthegmata* 1.8: Jean-Claude Guy, ed., *Les Apophthegmes des pères: Collection systématique. Chapitres I-IX*, Sources Chrétiennes 387 (Paris: Cerf 1993). This differs slightly from what AD 26.1 has: "Prepare your heart to bear the contempt of the evil ones. They will humble you in order to rule your heart. Impose silence so that you do not judge someone whom you know in your heart."

coming of hardship and opposition and the attainment of *hesychia*. For Isaiah, Christ remained calm throughout his suffering and passion, which tells us that "we too must overlook everything in this world before ascending the cross" (AD 13). When "the passions" have thus "been extinguished" and "the intellect is freed" and "when the intellect is liberated" from the passions "and reaches the Sabbath day of rest, it is in another, new age and considers new things, attending to matters not corruptible" (AD 13). *Hesychia* for Isaiah does not bring a person to some sort of drugged-out bliss or apathy but rather leads to greater understanding:

Silence gives birth to ascetic discipline. Ascetic discipline gives birth to weeping. Weeping gives rise to fear of God. Godly fear begets humility. Humility begets foresight. Foresight begets love. Love renders the soul undiseased and free from the passions. Then, and only then, does a person know that he is far from God (AD 13).<sup>91</sup>

The seeming paradox is that knowledge of our separation from God comes only *after* one is freed from the passions. Isaiah, again in a seeming paradox, calls this knowledge ascending the cross. On the cross we recognize our alienation. In early monastic spirituality, however, this is not a paradox but hard, truthful, reality. When we are caught up in our "atheistical" passions, we are too self-involved to be aware of God and thus of our separation from God. It is only in calmness, tranquility, and silence (*hesychia*) that we begin to discern the gulf that separates us from God, that is, as Thomas Merton put it, from our true self. This shows why humility is so important to the early monks in general and to Isaiah in particular.<sup>92</sup> This also shows why Isaiah's main concern is how to find and continuously maintain *hesychia*.<sup>93</sup> *Hesychia* requires manual work and austerities and fighting against thoughts, that is, the *praktiké* of the early monastic regimen. This may seem circular but is, rather, a coming full circle, a holistic

<sup>91</sup>Similar rhetorical "chains" may be found in Evagrius, *Praktikos*, Preface 9, trans. John Eudes Bamberger, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian 1981) 14, and Cassian, *Institutes* IV.43, trans. Boniface Ramsey, *John Cassian: The Institutes*, ACW 58 (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist 2000) 102. See the discussion in Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian: A Study in Primitive Monasticism* (2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge U 1968) 93.

<sup>92</sup>Above everything we require humility" (AD 3).

<sup>93</sup>Regnault, *DSp* 2088.

way of viewing life where all activities are connected and interrelated, where no part of oneself is isolated from another. Within such an understanding and such a sanctuary, we are continuously in God's presence: "Become, in purity," Isaiah exhorts, "an altar of God, continually having the inner priest making sacrifices, both in the morning and in the evening, in order that the altar is never left without sacrifice" (AD 5). The monk's cell, on this understanding, becomes the holy of holies and the monk becomes the world's altar on which Christ continually offers himself, in love, for the whole world.

### III. SAINT DANIEL OF SCETIS (6th Cen.)

#### *Fest Day: 8 Bashans (May 16)*

Macarius the Great and Isaiah of Scetis were holy men who, by word and example, taught others to live lives of holiness. One defining of the modern Western world has been the amputation of holiness from our common vocabulary and, more importantly, lived ethic. What is holiness? More importantly, what characteristics does a holy person have? In other words, how does a holy person concretely manifest holiness in his or her life? The *Apophthegmata*, or *Sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*, like Jesus, do not explicitly define holiness (*hagiósunê*, *hosiôtês*) although one could entitle that collection "The Book of Holiness": most—perhaps all—of its sayings are concerned with what constitutes holy behavior.<sup>94</sup> Holiness gradually came to be seen more and more in the person of the holy man (and, more rarely, it seems, holy woman);<sup>95</sup> eventually, holiness resided less in the holy person and more in his or her relics.<sup>96</sup> Even in the earliest

<sup>94</sup>Douglas Burton-Christie has recognized this by substituting his excellent study of the *Apophthegmata*, *The Word in the Desert, Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*. For a general overview, see Burton-Christie, "Quest for Holiness in [the] Fourth Century: Pagan and Christian Approaches," in *The Word in the Desert* 48-62.

<sup>95</sup>See Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971) 80-101 (rpt. in Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* [Berkeley: U California 1982] 103-52) and "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity: 1971-1997," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6:3 (1998) 353-76.

<sup>96</sup>See Evelyn White 2.292: "In the earlier period of the history of Nitria and Scetis, pilgrims made their way into the desert to be edified by the discourse of the fathers, to beg for their prayers, and to receive their blessing.

period of monasticism, however, holiness was often viewed, especially by outsiders, as the special provenance of the monks; hence the onslaught of pilgrims, both tourist and authentic, into the desert in the fourth century.<sup>97</sup> Abba Daniel of Scetis, sixth-century priest and monastic superior (*hégoumenos*) of Scetis, was both a holy man and a witness to holiness.<sup>98</sup> The collection of tales surrounding his name offers the modern reader one perception of holiness in late antique Egypt.<sup>99</sup> The understanding of holiness in this collection is neither all-encompassing nor definitive. But the dossier does offer a different and unusual slant on holiness, one that may cause us to adjust our perceptions of holiness in late antiquity.

Douglas Burton Christie, like most scholars and readers of early Christian monasticism, has linked "the monks' pursuit of holiness" with a "dramatic act of withdrawal," the "separation and removal from the mainstream of society."<sup>100</sup> Antoine Guillaumont has urged further that "this movement of withdrawal, of 'anachoresis,' marks the movement from pre-monastic asceticism to monasticism properly called."<sup>101</sup> There can be no doubt that

... In the seventh century a change seems to have come over both pilgrims and monks. The former seek out holy places believing that prayer there will, through the mediation of some departed saint, lead to a cure or to some other benefit; the latter are drawn more and more to realize the advantages presented to them by such an attitude, and come to look upon relics as an attraction bringing renown and wealth to their monastery. In proportion, then, as the sanctity of the living grew less remarkable, the veneration of the dead increased."

<sup>97</sup>See Georgia Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: U California 2000).

<sup>98</sup>Daniel's life may be dated from 485 to 570-80; for a discussion of Daniel's life and dates, see Part III of the Introduction to Tim Vivian, ed., *Witness to Holiness: Abba Daniel of Scetis* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, forthcoming).

<sup>99</sup>For translations of this material, see Vivian, ed., *Witness to Holiness*. The Greek text, to which reference is made in this article, was published by Léon Clugnet, "Vie et Récits de L'Abbé Daniel, de Scété," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 5 (1900) 49-73, 254-71, 370-91. Translations of the Greek, Coptic, Syriac, Ethiopic, Armenian, Latin, and Old Church Slavonic texts will appear in *Witness to Holiness*.

<sup>100</sup>Burton Christie, *The Word in the Desert* 54.

<sup>101</sup>Antoine Guillaumont, "La séparation du monde dans l'orient chrétien: ses formes et ses motifs," in Guillaumont, *Études sur la spiritualité de l'Orient Chrétien*, Spiritualité Orientale 66 (Bégrolles-en-Mauges, France: Abbaye de Bellefontaine 1996) 105-12, at 105.

these scholars are right—properly understood. Monastic separation does not necessarily have to be spatial, into Antony's literal desert,<sup>102</sup> but some sort of withdrawal or distancing is necessary in order to gain perspective on the world and its values.<sup>103</sup> After his baptism, Jesus withdrew into the wilderness and found the Devil (Mt 4:1-11). Antony, as is famously known and pictured, confronted hordes of demons in the desert. So did later monks. In commenting on this phenomenon, so curious and even repellent to moderns, Vincent Desprez has observed that

these famous acts of the demons [*diableries*] reveal fundamentally the hard and difficult aspects [*dura et aspera*] of the monastic experience: the monk who has renounced certain of life's amenities must fight against "thoughts," against the attraction that these objects continue to exercise over him. The complete solitude of the desert exacerbates that formidable confrontation between a person and himself.<sup>104</sup>

Withdrawal, then, does not mean flight and evasion but making the hard and difficult journey closer to one's true self, which is where God is.<sup>105</sup> Once one reaches this harbor, to use a favorite metaphor of the early monks, one has a secure and stable place from which to unload supplies and foodstuffs in order to sally out in search of those shipwrecked in the world. Abba Daniel, although certainly practicing separation or withdrawal in the desert of Scetis, was also very much engaged in the world, especially with travel from the desert *back* into "the world." This, in fact, is where he is most often pictured and where we, the audience-in-the-world, most often meet him: by our side—or up ahead, calling and waving to us to come look. Thus withdrawal is certainly an important and vital part of early monastic spirituality but, as the Daniel dossier shows, it needs to be balanced with *reaching out*. Monasticism, then, is as much centripetal as it is centrifugal. The monk flees one center, "the world," in search of his (or her) true center, God; once there, he can leave his monas-

<sup>102</sup>See Goehring 13-25.

<sup>103</sup>On this theme, see the powerful meditation of Belden C. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (New York: Oxford U 1998).

<sup>104</sup>Vincent Desprez, *Le monachisme primitif: Des origines jusqu'au concile d'Éphèse, Spiritualité orientale* 72 (Begrölles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine 1998) 184.

<sup>105</sup>For a deep recent meditation on this theme, see Laurence Freeman, *Jesus: The Teacher Within* (New York and London: Continuum 2000).

the center (or, more accurately, embody it, take it with him) and seek out the world in a gesture of healing and salvation.

This tidal action offers at least one explanation for the numerous monastic tales recognizing holiness in the world. Just as the monk knows (or should know; that's why the stories exist) that he will not reach perfection in this world, he also comes to understand that holiness and goodness do not reside solely in the desert. The world has multiple spiritual centers radiating out from the one God; *topos* (locale) is not *tropos* (way of life).<sup>106</sup> "It was revealed to Abba Antony," the classic exemplar of withdrawal, "that there was one who was his equal in the city. He was a doctor by profession and whatever he had beyond his needs he gave to the poor, and every day he sang the Sanctus with the angels."<sup>107</sup> In another saying, Antony, like Daniel, goes to Alexandria and there learns about the virtue of a layperson who surpasses him and learns the nature of that person's virtue: each day this person affirms that the entire city will enter heaven because of their good works while he will suffer punishment for his sins.<sup>108</sup>

One of the most striking examples of this genre of "the return to the world" involves Abba Macarius the Great. One time "when he was praying in his cell," a voice came to him, saying, "Macarius, you have not yet reached the level of two women who live in such-and-such a village," so Macarius decided to search out the women. When he found them he asked for their way of life and they told him that they had left their husbands and had lived together for fifteen years. "We drew up a covenant," they said, "between ourselves and God that to the day of our death our mouths would not speak a worldly utterance but that we would direct our thoughts to God and his saints at all times and would devote ourselves unceasingly to prayers and fastings and acts of charity." When Abba Macarius heard these things he said, "Truly, it is not the name of 'monk' or 'lay person' or 'virgin' or 'wife and hus-

<sup>106</sup>See the *Life of Saint George of Choziba* 33: "Child, do not think that it is the place [*topos*] that makes you a monk; it's the way you live [*tropos*]" ; Tim Vivian, *Journeying into God: Seven Early Monastic Lives* (Minneapolis: Fortress 1996) 94.

<sup>107</sup>*Alphabetical Apophthegmata*, Antony the Great 24, Ward 6.

<sup>108</sup>Lucien Regnault, *Les sentences des pères du désert: série des anonymes* (Solemes: Bellefontaine 1985) N 490.



band' but an upright disposition that God seeks, and he gives his Holy Spirit to all of these people."<sup>109</sup>

An "upright disposition" here seems to be understood as "prayers and fastings and acts of charity." The two women have indeed withdrawn, in this case from their husbands, but it is not their withdrawal per se that matters; it is the fruits of their *anachorésis*. Edified, Macarius then returns to his cell, "clapping his hands and saying, 'I have not been at peace with my brothers like these lay women have with one another.'" There are striking parallels between what Macarius says here and what Peter proclaims in Acts 10:34-35; these women are "gentiles" like Cornelius, and Macarius is a "Jew" like Peter, who learns that God's bounty is not exclusive: "Thus Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.'" We see here being expanded right before us the boundaries of what defined the holy man—or woman. Holiness, the monks saw, almost in spite of themselves, was not the exclusive possession of men domiciled in the desert.<sup>110</sup> As Claudia Rapp has noted, "Hagiographical texts play a significant and very particular role in the process that joins the author and his audience in their participation in the sanctity of the holy man or woman." Rapp calls this process "spiritual communication."<sup>111</sup> In the Daniel dossier, this "communication" is of persons *other than* the eponymous holy man. If the audience is monastic, then they are

<sup>109</sup>Coptic "Sayings of Saint Macarius the Great" 33. The text may be found in E. Amélineau, *Histoire des monastères de la Basse Égypte*, *Annales de Musée Guimet* 25 (Paris, 1894) 203-04, and a translation in Tim Vivian, "The Coptic Sayings of Saint Macarius of Egypt," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 35:4 (2000) 499-524, rpt. in Vivian, *Saint Macarius the Spiritbearer*. Although this saying (story, really) is not found in the Greek Alphabetical Collection, it is in the Greek Systematic Collection XX.21.

<sup>110</sup>This can be seen at the conclusion of the story of Thomas in the Daniel dossier: when Abba Daniel orders her to be buried at the monastery, "some of [the monks] began to grumble because he was ordering a woman's corpse to be buried with the fathers, and she a victim of murder." But the old man says to them, "This young woman is my amma, and yours. Indeed, she died to protect her chastity." Afterwards, the story reports, "no one opposed the old man." Jerome came to define the "true" monk not as the ascetic living in town or city but as the anchorite; see Goehring 53-72.

<sup>111</sup>Claudia Rapp, "Storytelling as Spiritual Communication in Early Greek Hagiography: The Use of *Diegesis*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6:3 (1998) 431-48, 432.

learning an important lesson in humility and equality; "the fact that it is possible for laity, living aid the pressures of the world, to attain such virtue heightens the sense of obligation which rests upon monks to rise to the same level."<sup>112</sup> If the audience is lay, that is, non-monastic, then they are learning the equally important lesson that holiness resides in their midst and not exclusively among the monastically garbed and gifted out in the desert.

The greatest confirmation of these understandings comes in the early monastic stories where the monks learn (and they do have to learn this) that the path to heaven is not as narrow as they might have imagined; in fact, sometimes the path seems to be a broad thoroughfare, with the double gates of heaven thrown wide open:

As Abba Silvanus sat one time with the brothers, he had a mystical experience (*en ekstasei*) and fell flat on his face. After a long time he got up and wept. The brothers entreated him, "What's wrong, father?" but he remained silent and continued weeping. When they forced him to speak, he said, "I was carried off to judgement and I saw numbers of people dressed like us in monastic habits going away to punishment and I saw numbers of people who were not monks going away into the kingdom."<sup>113</sup>

In our own day Flannery O'Connor vividly used this image to bulldoze the narrowly self-constructed gates of heaven that some Christians, in imitation of gated communities so popular now in suburbia, build for themselves and against others. In her story "Revelation," the self-righteous Mrs. Turpin sees

a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a field of living fire. Upon it a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white-trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>112</sup>Graham Gould, "Lay Christians, Bishops, and Clergy in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*," *Studia Patristica* 25, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters 1993) 399.

<sup>113</sup>*Systematic Apophthegmata* III.33 (= Alph. Silvanus 2); Guy, ed., *Les Apophthegmes des pères* 166-69.

<sup>114</sup>Flannery O'Connor, *Collected Works* (New York: Library of America 1988) 654. O'Connor was probably thinking of Mt. 21:31, "Assuredly I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you."



In another early monastic story, an old man "who served God for many years" is told by an angel that he does not please God like a certain gardener. The old man finds the gardener, who shows him great hospitality. Like Macarius above, the old man questions the gardener about his way of life. The gardener tells the old man that he eats late in the evening and gives everything beyond his needs to the poor; in the morning before he goes to work and in the evening before going to bed he says, "This city, from the least to the greatest, will enter the kingdom because of their righteousness, but I alone will inherit punishment on account of my sins." When he hears this, the old man responds (rather smugly, we may imagine) that these practices are good but they do not surpass all his efforts in the desert.

While the two are getting ready to eat, the old man hears people out in the street singing songs. He asks the gardener if he's not bothered by this and the gardener says no. "Brother," the old man responds, "wanting as you do to live according to God, how do you remain in this place and not be troubled when you hear them singing these [scandalous] songs?" The gardener replies, "I tell you, abba, I have never been troubled or scandalized." When the old man hears this, he asks the gardener what he conceives in his heart when he hears such songs. The gardener replies, "That they are all going to the kingdom." When the monk hears this he marvels and says, "This is the practice which surpasses my labour of all these years."<sup>115</sup> Amma Syncletica seems to have had such a person as this gardener in mind when she said,

Many of those living in a monastic community act like those living in cities and are lost while many of those living in cities do the works of the desert and are saved. Indeed, it is possible to live with a multitude and still be solitary in spirit just as it is possible to live as a solitary while one's thoughts are with the crowd.<sup>116</sup>

If the stories in the Daniel dossier, like the sayings cited above, expand the definition of holiness, they also contract it—or, in contracting it, empty part of it, leaving room for even greater expansion. One of the pronounced traits of later monastic hagiography

<sup>115</sup>Columba Stewart, *The World of the Desert Fathers* (Fairacres, Oxford: SLG 1986) 12-13.

<sup>116</sup>*Alphabetical Apophthegmata*, Syncletica 19; *Life of Syncletica* 97 (PG 28.1438A).

is the wonderworking of the saints, the miracles in the desert.<sup>117</sup> The earliest strata of the monastic tradition, however, the *Apophthegmata*, do not give much emphasis to miracles and wonderworking; holiness resides in other, quotidian, activities like prayer and basket-making and living in community.

The most noticeable—even astounding—thing about a later figure like Abba Daniel, contrary to one's hagiographical expectations, is that he does not perform a single miracle. It is true that in the Coptic *Life*, in the story of the repentant thief, a blind woman is healed by water that she believes has been used to wash Daniel's feet. (Although in a striking parallel in one story in the Greek dossier, Daniel orders similar water to be thrown on a nun who appears to be drunk and it has no effect on her. Apparently Daniel thought that the efficaciousness of the water lay in waking her up, not healing her.) Both she and the thief attribute this wonder to Daniel, but the miracle appears to have taken place because of the blind woman's faith in God and Abba Daniel.<sup>118</sup> Often in ancient storytelling "the author steps out of the mimetic narrative to guarantee . . . that what will seem unbelievable to the reader actually took place."<sup>119</sup> There is no "stepping out" in the Daniel dossier because there are, really, no miracles, no steps to take. Daniel, therefore, by the standards both of hagiography and classical historiography, is an unusual holy man; he is not a thaumaturge.<sup>120</sup> His charisma, at least as understood by his disciple, the narrator of the tales, lies in discerning holiness, bearing witness to it, and summoning others to bear witness and to benefit from it.

In the story of Mark the Fool, Daniel tells the people and clergy of Alexandria that Mark, the holy fool, is a chosen vessel and that there is no one in the city as righteous as he; Daniel's declaration

<sup>117</sup>See, for example, the *Historia Monachorum*; see Benedicta Ward's excursus in *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, trans. Norman Russell (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian 1980) 39-45.

<sup>118</sup>Her exclamation "May God and your name have mercy on me!" is reminiscent of the response to the holy man Paphnutius; see Tim Vivian, trans., *Paphnutius: History of the Monks of Upper Egypt and The Life of Onnophris* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, rev. ed., 2000) 30-37.

<sup>119</sup>John Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge U 1997) 82. For a Christian example, see the Preface to the *Life of Antony*.

<sup>120</sup>By contrast, see the stories about Abba Aaron in Vivian, trans., *Paphnutius* 114-41.

prompts the pope [bishop] to beg Mark to tell them who he is, which in turn causes Mark to tell his story. After Mark's death, Daniel summons all the monks of Scetis to come receive the old man's blessing. In the story of the Holy Mendicant, Daniel in similar fashion sees that a blind beggar is in truth doing great things. He and his disciple follow the beggar home and become the recipients of his generosity and hospitality. In the story of the woman who pretended to be drunk, Daniel discerns that the drunken nun, like Mark, is really a holy fool, and so he devises a plan to discover her hidden sanctity. After her holiness is revealed to the nuns, which brings about their repentance for their ill-treatment of her, Daniel declares that it was "for this reason" that he came there, "for God loves such drunkards as these." The Syriac version of this story makes Daniel's point even more explicit: "You have seen this mad girl; in truth God loves mad people such as these, who are drunkenly mad with ardent love for him."

One scholar has commented that "the people always were eager to see sanctity in the eccentric."<sup>121</sup> But perhaps that is putting the emphasis in the wrong place. Yes, there are "eccentrics" aplenty in the Daniel dossier, but the emphasis is not on eccentricities of madness and feigned drunkenness but rather on holiness. In the dossier, madness sometimes points to holiness, but it is not the only indicator. Andronicus, Athanasia, and Eulogius, in their acts of charity, are far from mad (except, of course, that "the world" may regard them as mad for giving away all their money). "Eccentricity," however, is a signal: the stories in the Daniel collection, like the Gospels (e.g., the Good Samaritan), do demonstrate that holiness may reside where we least suspect it. Daniel's role as monastic authority is to lend weight to this gospel witness. As priest and superior of Scetis, he has the power, apparently, to summon the monks of Scetis to come to Alexandria. This authority, according to the stories in the collection, was widely recognized: when Daniel goes to the Upper Thebaid, "the fathers for about seven miles went out to greet him. . . . some were spreading their clothing before him while others were laying down their cowls, and tears could be seen pouring forth like gushing fountains. . . . The archimandrite came out and venerated him

<sup>121</sup>Charles A. Frazee, "Late Roman and Byzantine Legislation on the Monastic Life from the Fourth to the Eighth Centuries," *Church History* 51/3 (September 1982) 263-79, at 265.

seven times." When he goes on to the women's monastery, the whole community comes running out "and they spread their veils from the gate out to where the old man was."

Although Daniel had great authority, as these stories indicate, the narrator takes pains, quietly to be sure, to show his readers that Daniel's power really lay elsewhere. In the stories of Athanasia and Eulogius, Daniel appears to be holy precisely because he has the humility and discernment to see holiness in others. He recognizes the saintliness of the "eunuch" Anastasia, finds a cell for her, protects her identity, and counsels her. When she is dying Daniel asks for her blessing and prayers for himself and his disciple. In the story of Eulogius, Daniel recognizes the grace-filled charisma of Eulogius' hospitality and care for strangers.<sup>122</sup> Thus Daniel confirms the spiritual truth that monks had long known and that the *Apophthegmata* affirm: holy persons do not reside only in the desert; they live also, and perhaps with even more difficulty and sanctity, in the towns, villages, and cities of this fallen world.

The qualities for which these lay people are commended are the same qualities that the monks themselves wished to cultivate: not only charity, hospitality, and chastity, but humility, detachment, freedom from anger, and the possession of a "good will" in whatever state of life, lay or secular, married or unmarried, someone lives.<sup>123</sup>

As part of its expansive nature, the Daniel dossier presented the ancient monk with a number of different types of asceticism, not just withdrawal into the desert, which became the norm in the fourth century. Celibacy, testified to by the New Testament, was the first form of *anachorêsis* in the Church and "was already a manifestation of separation from the world."<sup>124</sup> Eulogius in his ministry is presumably celibate, and Andronicus and Athanasia, though married, live celibately. Despite the fact that *anachorêsis* or separation later came to be identified almost solely with withdrawal into the desert, the Daniel dossier shows that separation from the world could continue to take diverse forms: in the "fool

<sup>122</sup>Interestingly, in his zeal to intercede for Eulogius, he oversteps his bounds, gets himself into trouble, and is reproved for his hubris by an angelic being in a vision.

<sup>123</sup>Gould, "Lay Christians" 399.

<sup>124</sup>Guillaume, "La séparation" 105. Guillaume's essays, cited here and below, have greatly influenced the discussion in this paragraph and the next.

for Christ;<sup>125</sup> in *xeniteia*, or loss of one's homeland,<sup>126</sup> and in monastic transvestism,<sup>127</sup> all forms of withdrawal from the norms of society. The fool forsook his rational self; the expatriate pulled up deeply set roots; the monastic transvestite gave up sexual and social identity. These different *anchorites* (with the original sense of *anachorésis*), with their different ascetic disciplines and renunciations of the world's priorities, illustrate monasticism's deep and abiding need to return to its roots and sources, thus reforming itself. Precisely because they stand *outside* the main monastic tradition (as later configured) while remaining part of the ascetic critique, the fool, expatriate, and transvestite confront and challenge the tradition, which is what they do in the Daniel dossier. Later figures like Saints Benedict, Francis, and Bernard are commonly seen as the great monastic reformers, but already in the fifth century, Isaiah of Scetis, in his withdrawal from Egypt to Sinai, can be seen as representing the spirit of renewal, both individual and corporate, that monasticism needs:

After many years spent in a monastery, the monk can feel resurfacing that which he had wanted to flee by leaving the world, that is, the weight of habits, comforts, the considerations of his circle of friends, and he then feels the need—in order to remain loyal to his ideal—for a new break, which he will realise through the anchoritic life, through *xeniteia*, and by leading a reclusive life.<sup>128</sup>

By the sixth century monasticism had become a generally accepted perversion; it was also ecclesiastically sanctioned and politically regulated, which meant that it had lost some of its countercultural nature and reason for being. Many of the figures in the Daniel dossier, by contrast, retain some of monasticism's—and Christianity's—original jaggedness: the holy mendicant, anticipating the evangelical fervor of Saint Francis, lives out true self-giving poverty; Andronicus and Athanasia abandon home,

<sup>125</sup>See Antoine Guillaumont, "La folie simulée, une forme d'anachorèse," in *Études sur la spiritualité de l'orient chrétien*, Spiritualité Orientale 66 (Bégrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine 1996) 125-30.

<sup>126</sup>See Antoine Guillaumont, "Le dépaysement comme forme d'ascèse, dans le monachisme ancien," in Guillaumont, *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien: Pour une phénoménologie du monachisme*, Spiritualité Orientale 30 (Bégrolles-en-Mauges: Bellefontaine 1979) 89-116.

<sup>127</sup>See "A Woman in the Desert: Syncretica of Palestine," in Tim Vivian, *Journeying into God* 37-52.

<sup>128</sup>Guillaumont, "Le dépaysement" 100, speaking of Isaiah.

property, and country; Anastasia not only renounces great wealth but also gives up completely her social identity. The foolishness of someone like Mark or the drunken nun, whose madness, as Antoine Guillaumont has pointed out, is "essentially a form of separation from the world," might just knock the ascetic reader back against the original sharp corners of his or her monastic and gospel vocation.<sup>129</sup> At a time when monasticism had pretty much settled down into Basilian, Saban, Pachomian, or Antonian patterns, the main figures of the Daniel dossier are barbarians at the monastery gates—or *within* the gates. Daniel, as it were, instead of merely performing the duties of law-abiding abbot, goes outside the enclosure to welcome these atypical ascetics inside, knowing full well that their presence within will initially provoke consternation and resistance but that such friction will eventually wear at the accumulated rusts of lazy habits and comfortable traditions.

In post-modern terms, Daniel's greatest authority may be precisely that of witness and storyteller, communicator of holiness, for it is he who tells his disciple the stories of Anastasia and Eulogius. It is he who causes Mark to tell his story and it is he who discovers the blind man's story and that of the "drunken" female monastic. In a sense, this narrative strategy only confirms Daniel's humility: it points the reader's attention away from the holy man and *towards* the virtues and holiness of the saints whose stories he tells—that is, towards the reader himself. Thus Daniel becomes a narrator within the narrative, and his position as monastic superior and status as holy man lend weight and credence to the disciple's tales. Unlike most hagiographical narratives, in these stories Daniel disappears from the narrative. It's as though the narrator had Daniel saying, in the words of Saint Macarius the Great, "That is why I said that I have not yet become a monk, but I have seen monks."<sup>130</sup> Daniel, Macarius, and Isaiah, and the early desert ammas and abbas in general, thus point beyond themselves and by doing so "confront us with our own responsibilities, since they invite us urgently to cherish the monastic original for existential reasons, rather than study the past for its own sake, and to extend its meaning into our own lives."<sup>131</sup>

<sup>129</sup>Guillaumont, "La séparation" 107.

<sup>130</sup>*Alphabetical Apophthegmata*, Macarius the Great 2; PG 65:261A.

<sup>131</sup>Ramfos, p. 62, speaking about Antony the Great.